

Enemy Action by TheFoxConstellations (orphan_account)

Series: [Nothing Different, Nothing The Same \[1\]](#)

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Summary:

It's cold, colder than any winter in Hawkins and he wishes he brought a thicker jacket. Though, he can't blame himself, no one expects to be dragged to another world.

Or: Steve Harrington finds himself in the Upside Down, things happen, none of them good.

1. ONE

Author's Note:

In which Steve Harrington feels guilty over the idea of throwing a party, and instead, decides to join in on the search for Will Byers.

November 8, 1983

He finally managed to finish his schoolwork, his fingers hurt having spent hours holding a pen as he scribbled furiously on paper, lamenting on the subject of Romeo and Juliet. He leaned back in his chair with a sigh, draping his cramping arm over his eyes. A stray thought made him freeze, pausing the idea of hosting another party, he turned to the paper on his desk. The flyer for Will Byers, holding all the information of where he last was and all other stray details. Nancy had insisted he take one just in case he were to see the boy. Steve stared at the image of the smiling kid with, a frown forming on his lips.

With a determined smile, he stands up and grabs the flyer. Ruefully, he shook his head, all the worried conversations Nancy had said about families who never found their kids and kidnappers snatching away children never to be seen again had gotten to him. In the spur of the moment, he grabbed a bag, stuffing it with the bare essentials; a bottle of water, a wad of cash, a flashlight, and hesitantly, he grabbed a set of clothes. Marching out the door, he slipped on a thin jacket and fished out the keys to his car. Steve locked the door behind him, turning back to his car with a sigh.

The teenager drove towards the Wheeler residence, stopping abruptly by the door with an awkward look. Pursing his lips, he glanced back at his car, wondering if he should let Nancy know that he was going to look for Will Byers. He squared his shoulders and took a deep breath, but before he could even knock, the door swung open and Nancy stared at him with a knowing look, a smile threatening to overwhelm her face.

“Steve,” she greeted him, a friendly look on her face.

“Hey,” He said, exhaling harshly as he dug a hand into his pocket. Grabbing the crinkled paper, he shoved it into her hand with a sheepish look.

“S-So, I, uh, I-I’ve decided to, you know, look,” he stuttered, his voice failing him as he gestured helplessly at the flyer.

He stuffed his hands into his pocket, looking away from the girl with a slight grimace, trying and failing to maintain his composure. Before him, Nancy giggled and he felt heat rising in his cheeks.

“That’s really nice of you, Steve,” She said, eyes crinkling sweetly before she turned abruptly to look at the stairs.

“Hold on,” She sighed, “Maybe I could come with you.”

Steve frowned.

“Don’t you still have work?” he asked, his eyebrows furrowing.

“Yeah,” Nancy murmured, biting her lip.

“Maybe I’ll go myself, it’ll only be for a few hours, and I got a couple to spare.” Steve offered.

Nancy pursed her lips, silent for a few seconds before nodding.

“I-I guess, just be careful,” She said, leaning up to kiss his cheek. “I think they said he was last seen-”

“On Mirkwood, I know,” Steve interrupted, a wry smile on his lips. “It’s on the flyer.”

“Oh, right!” she exclaimed sheepishly, handing back the flyer to the boy. “Are you gonna go with the rest of the search party that Chief Hopper put together?”

Steve grimaced. “Um, I heard Ms. Vald is gonna be there, I handed in my essay late and she’s kinda got something against me, so no. I guess I’ll go down Chester Road, it’s closer to my house and I don’t

think anyone's searched that area yet."

Nancy rolled her eyes.

"You're an idiot, Steve Harrington," she said, shaking her head. "Alright, if you're gonna go alone, make sure to be more careful, okay?"

Steve smiled down at her.

"Of course I will."

"See you later?" Steve asked, turning back to his car.

"See you!" Nancy giggled.

And with that, Steve turned away completely, striding confidently to his car. He waved at the girl, a sappy look on his face as he drove away. Above, Mike pretended to gag in his room at what he saw in his window.

2. TWO

Summary for the Chapter:

Things escalate from 0 to 100 real quick, Steve doesn't like any of it.

November 8, 1983

Later

He parked the car on the side of the road and stepped out with a nervous look. Rather than stopping at Mirkwood and checking it out, he parked at Chester, it's a little bit far from Mirkwood, but the search parties must have thoroughly searched that area, it would be useless to comb through those part of the woods again. He had a better chance farther away, in the places no one else has searched through. Chester is also closer to his house, if he happens to find the kid, he could drive back to his house and call a clinic or something.

"Fuck it," he snapped irritably. Anxiety wormed it's way under his skin.

Steve turned to face his car, leaning his hands against the cold metal as he bit his lips. He looked up with a frustrated sigh.

"Why are you doing this Harrington? Looking in the goddamn woods for some lost kid, and creepy Byers' little brother of all the kids to go missing." He breathed out, clenching a hand into a fist.

He looked down, biting the inside of his cheek.

"Because Nancy, do it for Nancy and her children's justice shit." He muttered.

The girl had spent a few hours looking at some packet of papers about kidnappings, and those...sex trafficking rings, kids being stolen away and sold. Even if Will Byers was the son of the town's pariah, no child deserved that to happen to them. Steve shuddered to think about how the kid's family was handling it.

If he had a little brother, all his hair would've been torn out by now, but of course, that would never happen. His thoughts traced back to the nasty rumors, the town's gossip mill. *The Harringtons*, they had whispered, ugly sneers digging into their faces. He still remembered the fake sympathy, the condolences and the laughter echoing behind his back. *Lost another kid, poor, poor Steve Harrington, never going to know his little siblings, never going to see them grow. Poor Charles and Delilah Harrington, guess they're cursed to only have one kid?*

He remembered, what it was like to go to school and hear the *teachers* whisper and giggle about any sort of gossip like fucking sharks, remembered the way the other kids shoved him around, not knowing the implications of what they said, only repeating their parents like some kinda messed up monkey. Remembered coming home and asking his mom why people were so mean, remembered a mask breaking and tears streaming down her face as she held him in her arms and cried for hours. He remembered how he had cried too, until his father had come home and held them on the bed.

Remembered they tried once more, just once more. Remembered that they succeeded, the baby's name was James, and he would've been the same age as Will, the same age as Nancy's little brother, but he wasn't. *Weak lungs*, the doctor said. He suffocated in his sleep, less than a year old, he never made any noise, just died in silence, in the dark, with no one to comfort him, no one to help him.

Steve remembered, will always remember how he found the body, wanting to surprise his parents by feeding his baby brother. Instead, he saw a corpse, dead, and the meaning of death itself and he finally understood why people were scared of it. But what he finds scarier was the aftermath, because death is peace, natural and a part of life, but the people left behind will always suffer from it, and the things they can do, the they would do are *not natural* . His father resorted to alcohol, both of them throwing their lives into work. Their paychecks may have grown, but they had never seen Steve grow. Both paying more attention to something else other than their only child, leaving him behind to be raised by nannies and the silence of a house too big for just one person. He remembered, but sometimes he wish he didn't, and he would always feel so guilty afterwards because why the fuck would he wish to forget about James, or Bryan, or Jessica?

So fuck it, he would find Will Byers and bring him home because Steve knows what it's like to hope, and hope, and see that hope crushed, shattered like porcelain slipping from clumsy hands. He would find the kid and bring him back, see that hope never die on Jonathan Byers' stupid face, and see that Joyce Byers will never fall apart like his own mom did. No one deserves to know what it's like to see their own child die before they do. No one deserves to know what it's like, to see what could've been *every single day*, and feel that bittersweet regret of 'I wish I tried harder' and the 'what ifs' asked in the dead of night to the stars that never answered.

Least of all to people like the Byers because despite all those shitty rumors, he still *remembered*. He remembered the *genuine* sympathy Jonathan had showed him, remembered the way Joyce had spoke to his mom in the parking lot on that stupid parent-teacher conference day, and how much more happier his mom was when they went home, and for once, she hadn't thrown herself into work. No, instead, she asked how he was, made him dinner, and kissed him goodnight. He remembered Jonathan's shy smile when he helped him up from the floor of the boys bathroom after those stupid bullies had laughed at him, and left him crying in a bathroom stall. He remembered vaguely noting how Jonathan picked up Will every single day after school, seeing them singing in the car to The Clash as they drove away and the secret jealousy that bubbled in his heart, spewing out his throat in nasty whispers of rumors that were never true. Remembered a time where Jonathan Byers was the only person to pay attention to him before other kids found out he had a pool in his backyard and a hefty allowance that could pay for cigarettes and a beer.

Steve sighed and rolled his shoulders before squaring them.

"Okay, you're gonna look in the woods and you're gonna find Will Byers. You can do this," he said confidently, slinging the bag over his shoulder.

"You're Steve Harrington, King of Hawkins Highschool, of course you can." He continued.

He never noticed the lights of the car flicker before he turned off the car.

...

He forgot his watch. He had forgotten his goddamn watch, he didn't know what the time was, but it was getting late. Steve cursed once more as he stumbled on the roots of a tree. While his backyard was in the woods, his parents had forbidden him from ever entering it, scaring him with stories of angry bears and Sasquatch. He was unbelievably clumsy while walking.

"Fuck you, fuck this, goddamn why?!" he spat, looking up the sky in frustration. He stood still for a moment, staring up with a long groan before he inhaled and began walking once more.

"Byers? Will Byers?" He called out, swinging the flashlight around recklessly.

It was beginning to get even darker, he didn't even know that was possible, but he didn't want to get caught out in the woods at night in case it were to rain or anything.

With a despondent sigh, he turned back, slowly but surely stumbling over tree roots and back towards the direction of the road. He had thoroughly explored and searched the area around Chester Road, and had instead, gone farther into the woods, going the opposite direction of Mirkwood. The chances of Will being here was getting lower and lower.

The sound of the leaves rustling behind him made him freeze, his thoughts fading away faster than fleeing mice and hummingbirds darting to the sweet nectar of a flower. The bushes swayed as something unseen ran around. While it could be a raccoon or deer, Steve's mind ran rampant, creating elaborate ideas of a crazed serial killer or some child abductor who drugged kids and did whatever he wanted to them. He swallowed nervously, glancing back and forth unsurely. Again, the bushes swayed and the leaves made a loud rustling noise. A branch broke, a large snapping sound that echoed in his ears. He stumbled back warily, his back hitting a tree. He hands shook as he turned the flashlight around him, the beam of light burning itself into the recesses of his eyes and his mind. His breath came out in short bursts, almost as he were hyperventilating and he tried to slow his breathing, but the rustling leaves were leaving no

chance for him to calm down.

Suddenly, to his left, a deer ran out from the trees. The quick movement made him freeze, tensing like a strained rubber band about to snap apart into tiny pieces of rubber, never to be put back together, only thrown away in the trash. He relaxed just as quickly, a sigh of relief making him deflate like a balloon.

With a shake of his head, he leaned against the tree.

Only to cry out in shock as the support behind him caved in.

“What the fuck?!” he screamed.

He flailed wildly, falling back on his ass as the tree seemed to *open up*.

Fuck me, just my luck that the tree I lean on has to open up like some kind of evil monster.

...

The first thing he did was curse wildly, an angry look crossing his face as he stood up and brushed the dirt from his pants.

The second thing he did was fall silent at the sound of a growl *that was decidedly not an animal*.

He breathed out sharply, pressing himself against the tree that *just closed up*.

His breath came out in sharp pants and he pressed a hand over his mouth, squeezing his eyes shut as whatever the monster, thing was growled again. He curled into himself like a scared rabbit that knew it was cornered, but could only hope in vain that the coyote would leave it alone. He remembers the cat on the corner store, how it caught a mouse trying to escape from a bag of grain once. It played with the mouse like a toy, flinging it around on the ground, pouncing on it like it was a chew toy. It had it's fun with the little animal before it ripped it apart like it was nothing more than a piece of paper, tearing it up until it was unrecognizable. The owner had yelled at the cat, and picking up the remains of the mouse with a

grimace and throwing it away in a bag like it's life never mattered, like it's body was nothing but trash, a piece of meat that never lived, never breathed to begin with. Saliva pooled in his mouth and he trembled against the bark, the sticky substance leaking from the tree soaked into his jacket. He wished he brought a thicker one, the temperature was low enough he could see his breath come out in white puffs of condensation. He had a feeling no one would ever find his body, no one would take it home and bury it. His body would just be stuck here like all the rotting bodies of prey that any predator hunts in the woods.

The creature growled again, closer this time, louder.

It was right behind the tree.

Tears slid down his face, and he tensed. Claws gently scraped the tree and the monster snarled loudly.

Slime dripped down it's talons as it reached out and-

A quick blur, too dark to see, it snarled. Steve's eyes shot open at the sound, but his eyes were blurry with tears still leaking down his face, wet droplets that slid down turning cold from the air, the monster cried out as if it were shocked. There were several more blurs rushing towards it, each shooting out from the decaying bushes, their steps too light to make any noise. The monster stumbled away from him and he gasped, stepping away from the tree to get a better look as he clumsily wiped the tears from his eyes, the cold liquid soaking into the sleeve of his jacket.

They were like foxes, but *wrong*.

With legs too long, and dark fur spiked up and stiff as if rubbed in some strange, nasty liquid. Their eyes faintly glowed red and they had a mane of acidic green fur that looked toxic, Steve would bet his firstborn that someone would die if they touched it.

They barked and yip, lunging at the monster with quick steps and retreating back before it could even swing a talon at them. They worked in a group, a tandem of blurry limbs, darting back and forth around each other. It took only minutes for them to drive the

creature back, the monster stumbling away with grievous wounds. It gave one last cry of anger, anger that it had lost its prey and that it was defeated.

Then, in unison, they turned to him and he flailed back.

“Oh shit,” he gasped, stepping back as one of the foxes stepped forward. “Oh shit, oh shit, oh shit!”

Then, behind him, the bushes rustled.

Steve turned towards the noise, shifting on his feet nervously as he glanced back at the foxes *that kept on coming*.

He wondered if he could make it if he ran but quickly discarded the idea when he recalled the way the foxes had darted back and forth between the legs of the monster, they were quicker than him and right now, they weren't even trying to kill him. If he ran, would they take that as a threat or anything and maul him? One glance at their sickly glowing red eyes made him shudder.

The bushes rustled behind him again and his breath quickened as he shifted side to side anxiously.

3. THREE

Summary for the Chapter:

Once upon a time, this was a beautiful place, but that was a very long time ago.

XXXX, XXXX

Let's read a story.

Once upon a time, in a realm far, far away, there lived a little fox.

Now the fox loved to play and he loved to do all types of things that were loads of fun!

The fox loved to eat, he loved to sleep, and he loved to dance, and play, but the best thing he could do was run.

Now, the realm the fox lived in was so beautiful. More beautiful than any other realm and any other land. This pretty realm had a sister, and they always shared, shared all the things they had. They shared so much that anything could go between them, traveling back and forth. One day, the little fox went to the other realm and saw that it too was very pretty, but it would never be as pretty as his realm. The other realm knew that, the other realm saw all the pretty things go to her sister, all the pretty little foxes and the pretty beings flocked to the beautiful realm.

And it was jealous.

And one day, one day it had enough.

See, jealousy is something that *rots* . It grows and it grows, like mold in the walls, and it infects and makes everything *fall apart*.

Jealously is the desperate screech of a girl when she sees what she wants but can never have. Jealousy is a beast in the night, a viper that bites the heart, *squeezes* , and just won't *stop*. Jealousy is a monster, unseen from the eye but seen by the heart through the quickened beat and the short breath, the clenching of a jaw, and eyes

that roll back in panic.

Let's start over.

Once upon a time, there was a very greedy realm and a very pretty realm, the Greedy realm was so greedy that it *stole* all the prettiest things from the Beautiful realm. It took and it took, and it *gorged* itself on diamond and butterflies, on the soft brown look of a flustered deer, and the weak, fragile flutter of a hummingbird's wing and the sharp, piercing look in a cat's eye. It gorged on beauty and laughed when the once pretty realm *screamed and wouldn't stop*.

Then it looked away, it stopped sharing and it hid away the beauty like a greedy dragon would've its hoard that it never deserved to begin with.

And the Beautiful realm screamed and cried, it begged of its sister to share.

Please?

It asked.

Help me!

It begged.

I HATE YOU.

It screeched.

The pretty realm died.

The gates closed. Everything was *gone*.

In its place, something else was born. A realm that festered, oozed with jealousy, and evil.

And when the Greedy realm looked back, it would realize the true meaning of *ugly*.

Shall we continue?

Once upon a time, there lived a little fox. The fox was very good at running.

One day, Mama Fox told him.

“Baby Fox, something bad is happening!”

And Baby Fox asked.

“What’s happening, Mama Fox?”

Mama Fox was so confused and so scared, so she told Baby Fox to run.

“Run away, Baby Fox! Run away and never look back!”

And Baby Fox ran, and ran, and ran. He never looked back until he saw a forest. Baby Fox was so tired, tired enough to crawl into a small burrow and sleep.

And above him, the world screamed until all that could be heard was a whisper, a sob, as it cried itself to death.

When the Baby Fox woke up, he learned he had slept for a long, long time. Mama Fox was gone and everything was gone, and the pretty realm was ugly.

Everything festered into an ugly wound like a scar too big for anything to cover it up. This realm was ugly and everything once pretty had become ugly.

And when Baby Fox looked into the very ugly water, *he screamed.*

“Ugly! Ugly! Why is my fur black!? Ugly! Ugly! My eyes are red and there’s something green on me!” Baby Fox cried.

Then, Baby Fox learned that Mama Fox was alive and all the foxes were alive!

But they were wrong.

And when he asked why everything was ugly, they laughed, cackled

like crazed hyenas and chased him with those piercing red eyes.

So Baby Fox hid away and shook, as cried, and begged the ugly realm to be pretty again.

But the Ugly realm laughed and told all the ugly dogs to chase him away.

So Baby Fox hid away, wishing to see something pretty again.

One day, another realm came. One that was innocent and clueless, let's call it the Innocent realm, okay?

Now, the Innocent realm was so curious, curious enough to look into things it should never have touched to begin with. It saw the Ugly realm and opened up, *shared*.

And the Ugly realm saw all the innocent, pretty things and wanted it.

One day, something from the Innocent realm opened a gate and something else fell into the Ugly realm, something pretty. And one of the realm's ugly dogs saw it and *stole it away* . Then another day, another pretty thing fell into the Ugly realm, and the ugly foxes saw it.

And Steve Harrington was very, very *pretty*.

One pretty enough that others would wish to steal that beauty and keep it for themselves.

4. FOUR

Summary for the Chapter:

He wishes he was home. He wishes his mom and dad were home. He wishes the house wouldn't be so empty.

He wishes.

But the stars lied.

Notes for the Chapter:

Tada! Magic!

November 8, 1983

The foxes were closer, and if he concentrated, Steve could almost imagine their cold breath wash over him; bathing him in the smell of sickness, the sour scent of something festering and infectious, things he'd only read in history class, of the bubonic plague, the Black Death's mocking laugh as it stole away lives like one would count paint chips on their walls. He shuddered, shivering not just from the cold but the complete and utter terror that hooked into his body like an unrelenting leech, burrowing under his skin and consuming any courage he had. Their red eyes seemed to mock him, playing with him like one would with an ant when they were bored. One of them lunged forward, diving in to snap at his feet, take a nip at his ankles.

Steve squeaked pitifully, stumbling back, and by chance, managed to avoid the glinting teeth that snapped shut at the place where his foot would've been. Goosebumps rose on his skin and a sheen of cold sweat coated his palms, he felt like a furnace in the middle of winter, heat radiating off him in waves, but the surrounding air was freezing, giving him an illusion of being cold.

Almost like those days in the middle of winter, when it snowed heavily and he was stuffed into a thick jacket, a shovel in one hand and a pair of mittens in the other. By the time he finished clearing

out the driveway, he was covered in sweat, suffocating in the heat of his jacket that was more of a straitjacket, tying him up and confining him with a claustrophobic sensation. While he may have been warm, he was also freezing, fingers numbed by the icy kiss of the wind that seeped past his gloves and seemed to attach itself to any part of him that held a shred of warmth. His face was sore, dry lips constantly wet from his tongue that would unconsciously dart out of his mouth to glide over cracked skin.

He fell back on his ass, scrambling back on his hands. Panting, he stared up at the foxes as they moved to encircle him.

“No, no, no,” he chanted, crawling back faster, scattering rotting leaves as he struggled to get away.

“Come on, please,” he wheezed, tears pricking his eyes.

Another fox charged, this one bigger than the previous, its pupils dilated in excitement as it opened its maw. Its grinning muzzle imprinted itself into his mind and he curled into himself, knees coming up to his chest as he thrust his hands out in a vain attempt to block himself from the ravenous creature.

The sound of a high pitched yelp made him look up when he didn’t feel the sharp pressure of a fang digging into his side.

It was a fox, but there was something off about it.

With more scars, running all along its sides and across its muzzle. The tips off its ears were torn, like cats after a fight they had, with ripped ears but it was something they wore with pride. It was noticeably smaller, and he would guess, younger. It was leaner too, almost unhealthy with the way he could see a faint outline of ribs, like people in the aftermath of a famine. Starving and half feral, it reminded him of the raccoon with rabies he found in his backyard the past summer.

The fox snarled, an inhuman caterwaul that echoed in his ears and made his head ring. It darted forward at a speed even quicker than the pack of foxes, Steve could only watch in shock as it mercilessly tore its way through the large fox’s throat. It dove forward with no

hesitation, maliciously leaping onto the back of another fox, digging into sharp claws and biting down with no signs of release.

Around it, the pack wailed, both in fear and anger as the large fox bled to death at their feet.

Steve pushed himself up, stumbling back to lean against a tree as the noise around echoed in his ears. For a second, he was frozen before he began to run away, his vision blurred as he hyperventilated, clumsily staggering away from the chaos behind him. The branches whipped through his hair, leaving streaks of gooey liquid running down his neck and dripping into his eyes. He sputtered, falling behind bushes and away from sight as he drew into himself, knees coming up to his chest and hands over his face, trying his best to ignore the noise, the chaos, everything around him, uncaring of how vulnerable he was.

...

Silence.

Dead silence.

He'd never realized how much noise existed in his life, even when it was quiet, there was always white noise, the buzzing of the light, the soft crinkle of paper as Nancy flipped the page of a book she was reading. The faint barking of his neighbor's dog, even the sound of water dripping down from the leaky sink in the kitchen that he never bothered to let his parents know about, too busy stewing in bitter resentment to let them know about the light that flickered in the third guest room or the leaky sink in the kitchen.

But this place was quiet, no sounds of birds chirping, not even the weak scamper of a squirrel could be heard. There was no deer, no bear, no wild raccoon to make any noise. Just predators that preferred the silence. He could hear the sound of his own breathing, a light and shaky thing, fragile and all too similar to the resigned acceptance of a dying mouse, a sad kind of sigh of one who felt too much and wished for the peace that could only be found in death.

Everything seemed to finally sink in. His situation here, he could

recognize this part of the forest, he had just walked through it, but whatever thing he went through when he fell through the tree, this place was not Hawkins, Indiana. This place was some kind of messed up, twisted version. It was almost like a different world with the way everything seemed to be alive and sentient, the trees breathing and pulsing in a faint manner and the ferns rotting, but also growing at the same time. He felt like a lobster or maybe a butterfly stuck in a cocoon, too big for the place it was in, but forced to endure more before it shed its skin, but the place he was in was just as big and not as comforting as a home a caterpillar weaved or a shell of a lobster that sheltered it from danger. No, this place was the opposite, all too willing to break him apart until he was nothing but dust in the wind, screams unheard and silent agony echoing through something that was familiar but not at the same time.

The sudden sound of a branch snapping shattered the silence and he swiftly looked up, eyes darting around to stare into the omnipresent shadows of the trees. They seemed to close in on him, the bushes crawling forward to tangle his feet, the roots of the tree crept up to him in a manner similar to that of a prowling panther. The trees seemed to lean towards him, closing in him and covering the starless sky from sight, leaving nothing but complete and utter darkness. Everything in this world was against him, too hungry for the energy and youth that thrived beneath his skin, almost glowing like the moon, a bright beacon so different from the dying rot that crept into every crevice of this realm.

Steve stared back down at the ground tiredly, lacking too much energy to give a damn about anything around him. From the corner of his eye, he could see something lightly step out from past the shadows of the trees, it's quiet pace was almost comforting. It approached him slowly, taking it's time to walk towards him, it was obviously in no rush. He wondered if this what predators felt like before the killing blow that would bring down a deer or snap the neck of a rabbit. Did they feel triumph? The feeling of confidence in their abilities to kill those weaker than them?

Slowly, he looked at the creature. A fox, the skinny one from before. There were no signs of injury on it, he almost thought it escaped from the pack of foxes scot free, before he noticed the way it limped

towards him and the faint trail of liquid that dripped from its side, it looked like blood. He stared, confused, eyebrows furrowed and a frown threatening his lips.

“You got hurt. You got hurt, you fought them, you could’ve watched, just watched them kill me.” He whispered, looking down at the fox that had stopped walking to sit down and look at him with wary eyes that seemed centuries old.

“Why?” Steve rasped, his throat dry and croaky akin to a frog.

There was no response, and logically, Steve should expect none. Maybe it was some strange feeling, or maybe he was just stupid, but he watched the creature walk towards him, unmoving, he was a statue. His limbs were made of concrete, unable to even twitch and the effort of lifting himself off the ground seemed too much of a daunting task. The fox came to a stop before him, bloody muzzle just centimeters from his face. He could smell the rotting scent of flesh that clung to its teeth, the layers of grime were noticeable, even though its fur was darker than the sky. Perhaps the most unnerving sight were its eyes that held intelligence and wisdom, but gleamed menacingly in a sickly red. Its tongue darted out of its mouth to lick its maw and Steve shivered at the sight of sickle like teeth, made to tear through meat. He could easily imagine it clamping down on his throat. There was a dark, sticky residue plastered on its fur, making clumps of dark hair stand up in uneven spikes. It reminded him of the time he saw a dog covered in oil. Almost unrecognizable as the disgusting liquid weighed down each hair, making everything cling to its body and ribs pronounced, the oil had dried uncomfortably and the dog was stuck in a cast of ominous shadows.

Bile threatened to rise from his throat and he cringed from the hot breath washing over his face as the fox exhaled.

It’s red eyes seemed to dig into him desperately, almost as if it were searching for something that it spent years looking for. Like a starved man who was handed a meal, it watched him with an intense stare, Steve couldn’t help but look into its eyes.

Several minutes passed as the two looked at each other, one confused, and the other searching.

Finally, the fox leaned forward, too swift for him to do anything but inhale sharply as it pressed its cold nose against his.

It came all at once, like the sudden flash when a light was turned on without warning, leaving you helpless to the bright spots that would dance in your eyes; or the feeling of missing a step on the staircase, your attention snapping back from whatever you were thinking about as unwarranted fear clutched your heart, digging through your ribcage and dragging out a choked scream with a wicked grin.

It was indescribable.

Perhaps he could say it was like wiping away the condensation from a window on a cold day or putting on a new glasses, he felt like everything had been muted, like he was wrapped tight in a blanket, unable to reach out and feel until this moment.

Perhaps it was like the unrelenting waves of the ocean, always leaving long enough for you to lower your guard and returning with merciless passion, leaving you trembling and cowering once again, cringing away from water and the salty taste of the sea breeze as the seagulls cackled a wicked laugh for a caw, beady eyes holding a mocking gleam.

It was an overwhelming sensation, seeing and feeling too much. Enough that it left stars in his eyes as thoughts become muddled, merging and converging together into a mess that was not too different from the hectic first day of school, or the disgusting slush left behind from melting snow as winter slept and spring awoke.

He convulsed, falling back against the cold ground as his body twisted in an unnatural fashion. Blinding pain consumed all his senses, and he screamed. Steve's back arched as he continued to shudder against the ground, disturbing the eerie silence with choked cries of pain.

Hot.

He was on *fire*. The unbearable sensation of his bones burning and everything in him melting, sizzling like oil on a pan, his blood seemed to *boil*.

Cold.

He was *freezing* . A stinging, frigid sensation spreading across his body, enveloping him in ice as goosebumps broke across his skin and his body shook relentlessly.

He was on fire, but he was encompassed in ice. His insides seemed to burn, boil as if he were over an open flame, but he felt like he had frostbite. Fingers numb, devoid of any feeling, and his body shook, shivering like it lacked any warmth. He curled into himself with a sob, tears streaming down his face as he heaved and wheezed for air.

He heard a whimper.

He couldn't tell if it was himself or the fox that curled beside him, hiding its face in his stomach as he continued to convulse against the hard-packed earth.

5. FIVE

Summary for the Chapter:

Steve learns he isn't the first to get trapped in this dark mirror world.

He won't be the last either.

November 9, 1983

He woke to the sound of something dragging against the floor. The loud, obnoxious crinkling of leaves echoed in the silence, and he twisted his head to see the fox gripping the collar of his jacket, stumbling back clumsily as it struggled to pull him towards the road. The fox panted tiredly, falling back on its haunches as a tongue rolled out past its teeth.

As Steve's sight focused, the image before him made the teen gasp.

Its fur was practically translucent, only the tips and the roots holding a semblance of color that once could've been black, but had been diluted to a soft shade of silver that seemed to resemble the rippling surface of disturbed water as the creature shifted from side to side.

Its eyes were no longer the menacing burgundy shade of dried blood, but more of a delicate salmon color, or the fragile pink of the coral and seashells he used to collect when he went on a trip to the beach; a time of happier memories, where the biggest problems in the world was not having enough seashells to make a necklace for his mother.

"You, what the hell?!" he cried out in shock and unbidden awe.

The creature chirped, tail swinging back and forth excitedly as it let go of his collar to sniff his face.

"Ugh, you need to brush your teeth! Back up, back up," Steve grumbled, sitting up to brush sticky residue from his jacket.

He grimaced at the slimy liquid that came away from his hair, slowly pulling his hand away with a disgusted look. Hesitantly, he lifted his

hand and gagged. There was a strong odor that reminded him of Cindy Burl's moldy sandwich she forgot in her locker back in middle school. The horrific smell had permeated the hallway for hours before the teachers had finally opened the windows to air it out, even though it was a chilly fall that year. Lots of people caught a cold the next week. The liquid smelled rancid and pungent, a stench that seeped into clothes and left some kind of ominous stain you hoped people would not question.

Beside him, the fox turned to face the direction of the town, an unreadable look in its eyes.

"You...your fur, it's," Steve blurted out, paying closer attention to the new and improved look.

The fox's ears twitched and it turned to gaze at him. It looked....cleaner, purer.

"Why, how, what?!" Steve sputtered.

The fox yipped, blinking slowly and calmly back at him.

"Was it before?" Steve asked, frowning in confusion. "I got...glimpses from whatever you did before. This place, it wasn't, isn't supposed to be like this."

The creature before slowly inclined its head in a slight nod.

"And you, you were black a-and the red eyes, you weren't supposed to be like that!" he said loudly, almost accusingly.

It wrapped its tail around its legs, and Steve couldn't help but want to pet the animal, to see if the fur was really as soft as it looked.

He squashed the urge, opting to peer at the creature's face closely.

"Okay, if it's yes, tap your paw once. If it's no, tap your paw twice." He said, leaning back on his feet as he took a deep breath.

"Those other foxes, they wanted to hurt me?" he asked.

Tap.

“Do you?” he wondered with furrowed eyebrows.

Tap. Tap.

“Okay,” he sighed. “Whatever you did to me, it helped you.”

Tap.

“That...pain, will it happen again?” he asked unsurely.

Tap. Tap.

“Okay, alright. Um, so did that thing you did to me. Uh, did it like, purify you or whatever, cause you look less...evil.” He said.

Tap.

“And that other thing the fox pack was fighting, it wanted to hurt me.”

Tap.

“Did it hurt anyone else?” he asked.

....

Tap.

“Wh-what? Who?” Steve demanded.

The fox gave him a look, and if it were able to talk, Steve would bet his firstborn child that it would question how many brain cells were still alive.

Someone, that thing, it hurt them. It hadn't even seen him and it terrified him, left him completely petrified, but somebody else, they were attacked and possibly killed. If they were dead, he hoped they died in a peaceful way, like the slow and calm sleep that came with blood loss, breathe slowing down to a snail's pace as limbs relaxed in the kind embrace of death. It would be horrible if they died violently, limbs torn apart and eaten alive as a monster consumed their flesh mercilessly, it's maw tearing into their torso brutally, pulling out

innards and carelessly digging away at soft muscle. Steve shuddered at the thought, ‘ *it could’ve been me* ’ echoed in his mind.

“Are they alive? Are they okay?” he asked frantically.

Tap.

“Are they here? Like, in this place, this world?”

Tap.

“Do you know where they are?” he rasped.

The fox stepped forward and Steve sighed.

“This again?” he asked sarcastically.

He didn’t know how he could understand what the creature wanted, it was like the information had always been there, just in the back of his mind. Like those vague dreams, just a faint whisper of memory hidden away, all fading too quickly once you woke up, but if you dug deep enough, you could almost get a taste of what was there.

He knelt down, the fabric of his jeans grew damp against the floor and he gestured with his hands in some sort of windmill motion.

“Let’s just get this over with.” He said, an over exaggerated frown on his face.

The fox sniffed, and he could almost imagine a mulish expression on its muzzle. It quickly walked forward, once more pressing a cold nose against him.

He could only blink and take a deep breath before his surroundings began to fade away.

Stupid dogs, always hungry. Trying to eat me?

As if they can, I am better than them.

Wait.

Chasing something. New prey?

Smells different. Not from here.

Walks on two legs, and crying?

Salty water smell. It shouldn't be doing that, they could smell it.

Different Thing is a... male?

He.

Brown eyes.

Brown hair.

Has weird stuff on it. Stripes on it, that crisscross. Something puffy too.

That's dumb, that stuff is heavy, it'll slow him down.

Small.

Adult?

No-

Child.

CHILD.

Byers.

"Will." Steve whispers, staring up at the sky.

"It's Will Byers, he's here. I was searching for him, and those things brought him here?" Steve questioned himself.

The fox blinked, as if surprised that he recognized the boy.

"H-Here." Steve stammered, cold clumsy hands pulling out a neatly folded paper from the pocket of his jacket.

He flexed his hands as he unfolded the paper, the crinkling noise filling the silence.

“The town put out this paper, it says that he’s missing and stuff. The search only started yesterday night and today. I think you were at the Byers’ house, or the mirror of it. That thing must’ve pulled him in when he was at his house and there was probably no one else there to see it.” Steve opened his mouth once more, but hesitated before he sighed and said resignedly. “I mean, the rest of Hawkins knows that Joyce Byers and Jonathan, his brother, well, they’re not exactly rich. Sometimes, when I go buy stuff, I can see Joyce Byers working the late shift.”

More quietly, he added. “...And the school always gossips about them, they make all kind of nasty rumors... I even heard the school faculty talking about them, it was really... harsh, the things they said when they thought no one could hear them..”

At this, the fox growled and he could almost imagine that if it were human, it would have a dark scowl across its face.

Steve looked out at the forest, the dark shadows seemingly growing before his eyes.

“We gotta find him.” he whispered, turning back to the fox with a determined look. “We have to. We have to get out of here, out this forest and this world.”

The fox growled in agreement as the two looked out towards the direction of the town.

“They’re coming, aren’t they? Th-those dogs.” Steve stuttered nervously, playing with the threads on his jacket sleeve.

The fox yipped, standing up and shaking off stray leaves as the two set off towards the road.

“We’re so fucked.” Steve whispered weakly.

Behind them, the wolves of hell howled in joy, the scent of pain and prey making them frantic to hunt, saliva dripping from their jaws as they scrambled against the forest floor wildly.

6. SIX

Summary for the Chapter:

Sometimes, we find ourselves so afraid, that fear is all that's left in our minds.

November 6, 1983

Keep going.

Just keep going.

Don't stop.

Don't stop.

Please don't stop.

His hands tremble as he grapples with the gun, a strangled whimper escaping his throat.

"No, no, no," He moans in agony, his breath quickening as he drops the gun, the metal contraption falling against the ground with a loud thud. Falling back onto his bottom, he scrambles back desperately, roughly scraping his hands against the dusty floor of the shed.

Above him, the creature loomed impossibly closer, it's maw opened in an eager gaping hole filled with gleaming teeth that threatened to dismember his limbs.

Yet, as quickly as it grabbed him, it disappeared.

Too panicked to pay any mind towards the swift disappearance of the strange creature, he half dragged, half launched himself out the door and towards the direction of the town.

*It didn't matter if he had to run, to walk, **to crawl.***

All that mattered was survival.

All that mattered was security.

Safety.

He just didn't want his heart to beat as quick anymore, for his breath to come out as short, strangled gulps, for his hands to tremble like delicate leaves in the wind.

And for tears to stream down his face.

"Mom, where are you?"

...

"Jonathan?"

....

"P-Please, I'm scared."

Behind him, red eyes watched in curiosity.